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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - NATO - Parliamentary Assembly -
Middle East - Olmert in the U.S.
PARIS - Friday, May 26, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

NATO - Parliamentary Assembly
Middle East - Olmert in the U.S.

(B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Dailies all report the visit to South America of President Chirac. For right-of-center Le Figaro he is: "presenting his government's diplomatic actions as a counterweight to the U.S. in the region." The appointment of conservative Islamist Abdelaziz Belkhadem to form the new Algerian government by President Bouteflika is widely analyzed in the French press as: "an insurance policy for Bouteflika's future." (Left-of-center Liberation)

The spring session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly starts in Paris today until May 30th. It elicits relatively little commentary for the time being aside from communist l'Humanite that qualifies NATO as a "political and military tool of the U.S." (See Part C)

A small piece in left-of-center Le Monde notes that the "French army is concerned about the "Iraqization of Afghanistan." "The French military sees the attitude of the Taliban forces... with the increase in the number of suicide bombings - a method that does not jibe with the Afghan mentality - as influenced by the methods used by the insurgents in Iraq." The French Defense Ministry believes that one of the reasons for the recent rise in violence is that the Afghan army, thanks to the training it has gotten from the Americans and the French, is leading more sophisticated operations in difficult areas outside Kabul where drug trafficking is prominent." An article in the Thursday edition of left-of-center Liberation details the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle's hunt for Taliban off the shores of Pakistan. One French military representative is quoted in the article: "Even if we did not go into Iraq, it is important for us not to leave the Americans all alone here."

The result of the visit of Israeli PM Ehoud Olmert in Washington is called a "smokescreen" in the Thursday edition of right-of-center Le Figaro. The daily notes that PM Olmert had difficulty in "hiding the jubilation he felt at being received with ceremony at the White House... His desire to please even prompted him to be overly flattering of President Bush, which did not seem to be to the latter's liking." Today's press focuses on Mahmoud Abbas' ultimatum to Hamas to recognize Israel within 10 days or face a national referendum on the issue. According to left-of-center Liberation, Mahmoud Abbas is "opening the door to a resolution of the Palestinian crisis... just one day after Ehoud Olmert's return from Washington where he received a very warm welcome." (See Part C)

Left-of-center Le Monde's front page asks: "The American stick or the European carrot: What will Iran choose?" Two full pages are devoted to the question. The article relates the history of the crisis with Iran over its nuclear program, the creation of the EU 3 and the evolving role of Washington in the negotiations with Iran. "If Jacques Chirac had had his way," the piece notes, "the initial European troika would have been a carbon copy of the Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis that was formed following the U.S.'s decision to go to war in Iraq, but Russia refused."

Right-of-center economic supplement Le Figaro Economie reports that Enron's top executives: Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling were found guilty on Thursday of fraud and conspiracy. "The wheels of the American justice system are slow... but a verdict was finally rendered after four years of investigation and four months of hearings." According to Liberation the "Trial proves the American justice's willingness not to show any leniency towards corrupt executives... Skilling faces up to 185 years in prison and Lay 165."

In an interview in center-right business daily Les Echos Mexican president Vicente Fox says: The American immigration law could serve as an example for Europe." Fox outlines why he supports the American immigration proposal. With WTO members struggling to strike a deal by mid-June, both of the economic dailies: center-right Les Echos and centrist La

Tribune, say that: "The EU is still waiting for a sign, an overture from the U.S. concerning a reform of the Farm Bill... And the EU Trade Commissioner's latest proposals have been casually cast aside by the Americans."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

NATO - Parliamentary Assembly

"The Atlantic Alliance's Planetary Ambition"

Michel Muller in communist l'Humanite comments (05/26):
"Discussions concerning the domination of an American-led NATO vs. an independent European Defense, which is France's preference, today appear completely outdated... The idea that this political military alliance is still essential to ensure international peace and security is appealing. But in reality it is merely an illusion... and NATO's initial purpose has been radically altered from being a organization devoted to the defense of its member states to a military and political tool... of the U.S."

Middle East - Olmert in the U.S.

"Going it Alone"

Catholic La Croix's Jean-Christophe Ploquin writes (05/26): "The U.S. is approaching a danger point. With the visit of Israeli PM Ehoud Olmert, it has ratified the principle of a unilateral approach to establish the boundaries of Israel... Olmert has given himself a few months to negotiate an agreement with the leader of the Palestinian Authority... maybe he is in fact hoping that the Hamas government will fall apart on its own... As for the Bush Administration, it has pragmatically given even more weight than before to the rule of might in the Middle East. It has stomped on the UN resolutions that called for negotiations... and ripped in half the Road Map, inspired by the Europeans and supported by the entire international community." STAPLETON